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***Politicisation of Sexual Violence: from Abolitionism to Peacekeeping.* 2010. Carol Harrington. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited 239pp ISBN 9780754674580 (hbk)**

Reviewed by Ogochukwu Nzewi¹

In her book the *Politicisation of sexual violence from abolitionist to peace keeping*, Carol Harrington questions the assumption that the post 1990s surge in the politicization of sexual violence was as a result of the success of feminist activists in breaking down the sexist indifference and silence to the issue of rape. The book argues that the escalation in the international attention paid to sexual violence can be explained in the growth in trauma science and the decline of socialist intellectualism in post 1990s. Without diminishing the contribution of the feminist movement towards the successes of the post 1990 efforts in bring sexual violence into political reckoning, the book takes a critical point of departure where the successes in international policy and political interventions in sexual violence issues is linked to the achievement of feminists in “overcoming sexist silence” on issues of rape (p 2). This presents new theoretical opportunities in the problematisation of rape and sexual violence as a gender issue in the 21st century, as the work concretizes the significance of authenticating rape as a medical, ethical and human rights problem.

Harrington begins by discussing, in depth, abolitionist constructions of sexual violence. These constructions laid the foundation for the concept of individual freedom which is embedded in the conceptualization of rape. Examining in substantive detail abolitionist stories of sexual violence the author is able to clearly demonstrate how the representation of survivors’ deeply traumatic episodes such as the intense violation of their bodies, spurred political and social causes. In so doing, the author also shows two important premises for the promotion of individual freedoms going into the 20th and 21st centuries. The first being the importance of testimonies of victims as both methodology and therapy and the second being the premium placed on the authentication of these claims, in other words the value of evidence-based (scientific) inquiry. Chapter one, in exploring the vivid emotional picture of the violated female body, demonstrates the ability of such strong images to attract human interest and spur individuals and movements of varying agency towards the advancement of their causes.

Next, the author methodically demonstrates (based on historical analysis), that 19th century international women’s associations like Josephine Butler’s International Abolitionist Federation and Elizabeth Staton’s International Council of Women had roots in the abolitionist movement, continuing with the theme of bodily integrity. More significant in this second chapter, is the author’s effectiveness in laying the foundation for later arguments on how trauma science changed women’s issues. Harrington achieves this by clearly articulating the initial disinterest in linking female bodily violations to sexual violence and its attendant trauma and the gradual change in this view, based on the growth in the 19th century of medical expertise on the female body and psychology.

In chapter 3 the author’s argument which questions the sexist assumption of politicization of rape begins to crystallize. One line of argument is centred on the altering perceptions of rape as the main determinant of sexual inequality during the interwar

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period (periods between World War I and World War II). This chapter examines distinct perspectives by women organizations on the issue of sexual violence between the two wars. The first was the supportive role played by Western women organizations in the United Kingdom and United States of America war propaganda. These organizations held the view that the sexual violation of women in war times is a characteristic of the armies of tyrant regimes in war. The second was the budding inclination of some feminists to begin to problematise women's freedom and emancipation from legalistic and economic standpoints. These two perspectives show how feminists agenda on sexual equality and women's freedoms was strategically distanced from representations of sexual violence.

Chapter four of the book shows that despite the sexual atrocities carried out by all sides during World War II, the action by governments and activism by international women's groups directed towards the rape and violation of women during and long after the war was very minimal. For post war Europe and America, the cold war and communism seemed to dictate institutional patterns and agenda of women groups. Specifically, in the post war rebuilding efforts, the link between development and gender/sexual equality was established without strong advocacy for women's individual bodily integrity in relation to prostitution and women trafficking. Additionally, Harrington lays out evidence which indicates that in spite of the intensification of activism and scholarship on women's issues in the 1970s and 1980s, the issue of rape as a gender equality and human rights concern was nuanced and flitting. Although falling short in proffering explanations, the author infers some reasons for the silence during this period including the stealthy political games by women's organisations on both sides during this period in encouraging this political silence. This silence is markedly similar to the subtlety administered towards issues of sexual atrocities in the activism against slave trade, as seen in chapter one of the book. This is an indication of the author's ability to present her discourse in a way that reveals significant historical patterns which allow the reader to explore other dimensions of analysis. For instance the in-depth presentation of group activism from these two historical dispensations (Slavery and post World War II eras), show how interest groups become the locus for policy agenda setting, where group problematisation of issues and decisions on policy options is predicated on a complicated web of political, social, legal and economic factors.

From the exploration of evidence on shifts in the use of knowledge by different groups and actors, Harrington in the first four chapters of this book, effectively begins to unpack her guiding research framework on governmentality². She achieves this by revealing the continuum of actors in the utilization of knowledge and how actors try to stamp their authority on key issues at particular times, thus inspiring change by governing the 'mentality' of the public. This framework supports the noted variations in the feminist agenda of different international women's groups. These discrepancies in the feminist agenda on sexual violence as a problem of gender equality, illustrates as simplistic, the tendency to attribute the politicization of sexual violence to feminist agenda against sexism.

Securing further arguments for her premise in chapter 5, the author shows how attention to the psychological dimensions of human rights opened up discourse and research which began to link sexual violence as a mental health issue in government and feminist circles. This subsequently engendered scientific research showing the

² Foucault conceptualized governmentality

relationship between violence and mental health in general and rape and trauma in particular. Thus, Harrington's arguments seem to suggest that although rape issues may have been highlighted by different feminist groups, the development of trauma science gave rape advocacy the scientific backbone needed to push issues of rape into policy and political reckoning as a human rights issue.

As in the interwar years, the domination of the psychological paradigm in US policy and political discourse on sexual violence also revealed a sectionalizing of anti rape feminist views on how best to approach the issue. Some anti-rape feminists were involved in the medicalisation of rape as a trauma issue: "from the start feminist anti-sexual violence activists engaged in dialogue with a project led by Vietnam group to gain official recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)"p 112. Others characterized trauma as a condition which many women who experience rape do not fall under, a situation which may unduly exclude women who indeed may have experienced rape but fall short in terms of its ascribed psychological dimensions. Others felt that rape was an issue of sexual power and male domination and as such, should be seen as an issue for social change and not psychological treatment. At the other end of the spectrum were feminists who argued that both politicization and medicalisation of rape only served to inspire a 'victim culture' in women. By deconstructing the suggestion of a monolithic feminist agenda and by showing the different dimensions and degrees of the feminist presentations of sexual violence, the author is successful in establishing domination of trauma science as a major catalyst in the rapid growth of rape as an international political and policy issue.

From chapter 6, the second prong of Harrington's argument is the influence of the decline of socialist intellectualism in the international prominence of rape and sexual violence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, United States led psychosocial view points on issues of human rights grew prominence in the United Nations. Some women groups in turn took advantage of the declining Soviet Union to begin to push the psychosocial aspects of rape as a human rights issue. This also energised the articulation of post war/conflict zones as a site of mental health emergency based on the investigations into human rights abuses and international tribunals focusing on war atrocities and rape during the Yugoslav war. Unlike in previous years, international women groups' conceptualization of rape seemed to coalesce in the appropriation of human rights and mental health dimensions to war atrocities, including rape.

In the final chapters (chapters 6-8), the author manages through her discourse to show how the medicalisation of trauma of victims and communities in war zones from Bosnia and Kosovo to eastern DRC post 1990, began to focus the attention of international organizations such as the UN on rape perpetrated by both international and local armies. Additionally, the rising concretization of sexual violence as a traumatic event created a domino effect in the international administration of conflict zones. First, trauma became significant in the theorising of 'new wars' (factional, armed warring groups). This in turn introduced multi-dimensionality in peacekeeping operations³ in conflict zones around the world. These multidimensional peacekeeping operations in turn adjusted to meet the challenges of post war rebuilding operations by mainstreaming gender in peacekeeping, which sequentially drew attention to sexual exploitation and

³ This model of peacekeeping largely promoted by the United States and Britain, involves humanitarianism, rehabilitation and rebuilding the fabrics of economic and political life in intervention sites.

abuse (SEA) by peacekeeping operations personnel in places like Kosovo and Bosnia. The practices by multidimensional peacekeepers not only condoned the sexual exploitation and abuse of women (trafficking and prostitution), but also implicated peacekeepers as perpetrators. Attention was focused on the trauma experienced by sexual exploitation and abuse victims (SEA) victims by international peacekeepers. Thus, the book highlights how the collapse of the Soviet Union introduced new challenges first in terms of politicizing the trauma experienced by women in war zones and second in terms of the activities of peacekeeping corps in women trafficking and prostitution.

Although Harrington manages to show how the issue of rape had gained importance in international peacekeeping, the author's discussion on the diffusion of peacekeeping operations into post war conflict in chapter six is sudden and abridged, the conjoining of these two issues being the brief allusion to 'new wars'. However, this sets the stage for the final two chapters which dwell on the authors' conceptualization of the politicization of sexual violence in peacekeeping operations since the 1990s.

In chapter seven and eight the discourse unpacks the difference between the Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), the former referring to sexual violence within communities and the latter sexual violence perpetrated by the international community. Until now, the distinction between SGBV and SEA and the relationships of these key international gender intervention frameworks to rape was not clear. In her introduction, (p 5), the author assures the reader that her analysis pays attention to these distinctions as a basis for analyzing sexual violence. However, this thread of analysis is overpowered by the authors' attention to the presentation of her findings, blurring the analytical connections of her findings to SGBV and SEA respectively. Also, based on the attention paid to peacekeeping operations, the import of the understanding of these terms within the context of the politicization of sexual violence is heavily tilted towards the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) viewpoint. The author, thus, falls short in her initial promise of articulating these two international sexual violence points of view.

A particular strength of the book is the author's carefully presented historiography of constructions of sexual violence spanning two centuries. While the book systematically indicates how trauma science and the decline in socialist agenda may have helped in the progression of rape from the periphery to mainstream of international politics and policy, its engagement with the subject of rape itself is vague as there is a lack of distinction in the definition and conceptualisation of the terms such as rape, sexual violence, SGBV and SEA. For instance, the use of the terms rape and sexual violence interchangeably in the book (which is also mirrored in this review), raises questions in terms of some of the conclusions reached by the author in her arguments as these two terms although alike may carry different conceptual and interpretative weights.

The limitation of Harrington's analysis to Western led feminism efforts and the Western bias in both scholarship and practice examples used in this work raises some challenges for comparative and generalisation purposes in problematising gender based violence in other contexts like Africa. This unfortunately protracts the perception in scholarly and activism circles that the western experience of feminism activism represents the most credible prism from which issues of feminism in the 20th and 21st century can be tackled. For instance, her treatise shows that western feminism movements, in seeking gender equality sometimes kept issues of sexual violence

peripheral to issues of women's access to economic, social and justice rights. This conceptualization of gender equality which flows through the book, takes for granted the public/private dichotomy of women's experiences in other contexts, where publicly women may have all the trappings of equality and independence but at home are honed in by the social constructions of gender relations applicable in their environment. Perhaps, some of these dimensions in the interrogation of rape, stems from the notable concentration of Harrington's work on the experience of SEA which although benefitting the international interventionist dimensions of sexual violence and human rights, fails to fully engage with the SGBV aspect of sexual violence and rape (despite the authors initial allusion to it). An aspect which may, arguably, have more significance to gender equality and human rights in less developed economies of the world especially Africa. Ultimately, for a resource material that dwells largely on the internationalization of sexual violence as a human traumatic experience, it is brief in its examples of 'other' international stories outside Europe and America. Thus, although the authors work adds an important dimension to the theorizing of rape as an international political issue, it is somewhat limiting in the internationalization of evidence.